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AUTHOR Morgan, Charlotte T.
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ABSTRACT

Various agencies contributed to the education of black adults in Manhattan (New York City) during the period 1880-1930. Most of these programs were centered in Harlem as that area became home to vastly increasing numbers of black people. Organizations which contributed to adult education included the churches with their "lyceums," which offered social and cultural activities; the public schools, which offered mainly elementary education courses and some sewing and trade courses; social organizations such as the YMCA, the YWCA, and the National Urban League; and the public library. The quality of these programs was limited, however. The use of racial history or culture was consciously espoused by few, but carried out as an assumption in many of the programs. Activities in black Manhattan reflected American adult education practice in terms of multiplicity of sponsorship, problems of marginality, and significance of leadership. In addition, certain truisms were demonstrated: first, multiservice organizations provide popular learning environments with great flexibility, but institutional mission affects program development; and second, community involvement in program development facilitates participation. Analysis of the history of the programs also showed that propagation of education with a racial focus will attract students, but it may not necessarily improve their lives. (KC)

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RACIAL INTEREST IN THE EDUCATION OF BLACK ADULTS

MANHATTAN, 1880-1931

by

Charlotte T. Morgan, Ed.D.
Herbert H. Lehman College of the
City University of New York

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Introduction

Since the sixties, ethnicity has assumed a highly visible position in American life. In response, schools and colleges have added programs which acknowledge ethnic concerns. For African-Americans this has meant the growth of programs based on their history and culture. Adult educators serve a population which has not benefitted academically from these curriculum revisions. Therefore, practitioners interested in remedying the situation have been urged to design programs which address the social, economic, and cultural values of the black community.[1] The implicit assumption has been that these programs would increase the rate of black participation in adult education and strengthen efforts for social change. Opponents of these changes fear reverse racism, self-imposed segregation, and glorification of the past. They have referred to the general resurgence of group interests in education as essentially un-American and an indication of the weakening of the national spirit.[2] This division of support poses a dilemma for adult education.

Concern regarding the desirability of programs based on a racial approach has not been confined to this era. Decades ago, appeals were made for consideration of racial interests in educational efforts. An understanding of the ways in which the issue was addressed in the past should prove helpful to those interested in the history of adult education and the application of that history to current practice.

Perceptions of Educational Needs and Purposes

Between 1880 and 1930, public interest in black education focused

on the attainment of literacy and the relative merits of an industrial as opposed to an academic curriculum. Despite the decline of black illiteracy from 90 percent in 1880 to 30 percent in 1910, the numbers remaining illiterate influenced the 1910 census report to identify American illiteracy as primarily a black problem. In New York City, the black illiteracy rate was 3.6 percent; within the state it was 4.2 percent. Both figures were less than the state rate for whites which was 5.5 percent.[3] Nevertheless, the continuing migration of Blacks from southern states where the illiteracy rate was much higher caused alarm. Charles A. Gardiner, a New York State regent, called for educational qualifications for the franchise and funding for literacy programs because of "millions of poverty-stricken, ignorant and illiterate negroes" who had formed a "hugh tidal wave of negro illiteracy" which had submerged the South and was about to do the same to the North.[4] Although national interest in improving literacy was high, in the case of Blacks, the debate over industrial as opposed to academic education assumed dominance.

The movement for industrial education reached its zenith during the progressive era. Supporters encouraged its practice for a variety of reasons. Its emphasis on morality, thrift, economic independence, and material success appealed to popular sentiment. It offered an answer to economic discrimination by providing opportunities for self-support and respectability. A federal report labeled it "the very essence of democracy" and criticized academic education as medieval, culturally biased, aristocratic, and arbitrary.[5] There were also less salutory reasons for its promotion. Industrial education provided cheap, trained labor and did not endanger the status quo.

Those opposed to the emphasis on industrial education were aligned

against Booker Taliaferro Washington, the most powerful educator of the era. Among the most influential critics of the policies he advocated were Kelly Miller, Dean of Howard University's College of Arts and Sciences; Willian Edward Burghardt Du Bois, then professor of sociology at Atlanta University; and Alain Leroy Locke, professor of philosophy at Howard University. Their support of the academic curriculum emphasized the spiritual and the contemplative. Their concern with human dignity lead to consideration of racial pride and racial solidarity at a time when racism was rampant. Inevitably, racial interests became educational purposes.

Advocating education for racial pride and solidarity was difficult in an era when the thinking of both black and white Americans was contaminated by the presumption of black inferiority. While exposing the plight of Blacks, the progressive journalist, Ray Stannard Baker, wrote of "a tremendous struggle"--"the struggle of the backward race for survival within the swift-moving spectacle of the advanced race." In a speech urging support for black education, a popular orator disavowed any intent "to claim that the Negroes as a race are equal to the Anglo-Saxons as a race." Kelly Miller wrote that his people were "a backward breed that had never taken the initiative in the progressive movements of the world." But, he also argued that the presumed backwardness was neither inherrent nor unchangeable.[6]

Education was the means by which the inferiority of Blacks would be eliminated and assimilation achieved. Charles Eliot, president of Harvard University, believed that the way to deal with ethnic groups was to educate them so that higly trained professional would emerge. From this group assimilation would occur. Some Blacks believed that physical assimilation would take place. Frederick Douglas, in his declining years, wrote:

> My strongest conviction . . . [is] that he [the black person] will be absorbed, assimilated, and will only appear finally as the Phoenicians now appear on the shores of the Shannon, in the features of a blended race.8

The majority of black educators neither expected or desired this prophecy to come completely true. Many instead cited the need for black self-respect, black unity, and knowledge of the black heritage. Kelly Miller, an exception, wanted to have it both ways. Miller believed the color line would be "wholely obliterated" in the future because he felt brotherhood was more fundamental than race. Until this occurred, however, he saw appeals to black self-respect as vital.

> If you wish to reach and inspire the life of the people, the approach must be made not to the intellect, not yet to the feelings, as the final basis of appeal, but to the manhood that lies back of these. . . . This must be the dominant note in the education of the Negro. . . . A race like an individual, that compromises its own self-respect paralyzes and enfeebles its own engergies.9

His interest in an African heritage was limited. For Miller, the middle passage ended the black American's ties with African culture. "No ennobling or endearing stream of influence followed . . . across the sea." Miller acknowledged a "crude consciousness," but considered it "too feeble for effective service in the making of a race."[10]

Booker T. Washington also considered the ties of the African heritage as secondary. He was interested in the exporting of industrial education, but not in the emigration of black Americans. To his mind, the place where Blacks would better themselves was the South. To a young man who told him he planned to emigrate to Africa and "die if need be" for the salvation of the race, Washington replied: "I am not going to ask you to die for the Negro race in the South, but I am going to ask you to go down there and live for your race." Washington's feelings of racial pride were strong: mem-

bers of the National Colored Teachers Association were told that he "was as proud of being a Negro as any white man is proud of being a member of the white race" and urged to "teach pride of race."[11]

Consciousness of a racial identity which included Africa permeated the educational thought of W. E. B. Du Bois. His statement on the dilemma faced by Blacks in a society which denied Africa's worth has become a classic.

> One ever feels his two-ness,--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.12

Academic education was emphasized in part by Du Bois because it made life worth living in America's hostile environment. The emphasis on culture which existed in an academic curriculum was useful for helping Blacks develop the art, the literature, and the sense of self which he believed was part of their mission to America. He considered Blacks the "advance guard of the Negro people" who must not be absorbed by white Americans. Du Bois asserted the "stalwart originality" of black American culture and called for race organization, racial unity, and the development of supportive black institutions.[13]

The promotion of black American culture earned Alain Locke a national reputation. In 1911, a year before he was appointed to a professorship at Howard University, Locke discussed the philosophy which would guide his work in education. At a meeting of the Negro Society for Historical Research, Locke called on the black American "to redeem his past," in order to gain self-respect. It was his opinion that self-respect and corporate pride would help black Americans improve their circumstances or at least handle them better. According to the New York Age report, he also believed that racial consciousness had to stretch beyond America to

"satisfy the ultimate mental and spiritual needs of the Negro in this country."[14] He did not view the African heritage as detrimental to the black quest for equality. He claimed that it would not "interfere with full equality any more than being loyal to Anglo-Saxon civilization impedes American patriotism" because American society stood for "common ownership of the utilities of civilization--not amalgamation of cultures."[15]

Locke's interest in race consciousness extended beyond the concept. He proposed to make being black a source of strength rather than weakness and to create "a new Negro." His two objectives were the attainment of American ideals and institutions, and the development of more positive self-respect, self-reliance, and self-direction. The support of black creativity would stimulate black genius and increase the common culture. Once this was obtained, he believed Black people would be respected and be fully accepted into American society. The improvement of race relations through a knowledge of black culture became a special concern. He supported cooperative, interracial efforts involving "the representative and better elements of the white and black citizenry" to demonstrate that "just as people could be indoctrinated into these negative social attitudes, they could be educated out of them."[16]

The Social Setting, 1880-1930

Although Harlem became the acknowledged center of black racial consciousness, it was not always the center of the black community. Prior to 1900, Blacks occupied scattered areas throughout the borough, principally Staggtown (City Hall district), Little Africa (Greenwhich Village), Yorktown (east eighties), the Tenderloin (lower to midtown west side), and San Juan Hill (midtown west side). Blacks moved into these areas as a result

of segregated housing patterns, the pressures of migration, and profiteering real estate practices. It was the latter, in particular, which made Harlem available to Blacks.[17]

After 1900, Harlem was subjected to two invasions: one by native New Yorkers and the other by migrants from the South and the West Indies. Between 1900 and 1930, New York's black population increased by more than 500 percent. Out of a total population of 327,706 in 1930, 59 percent were born outside of New York State and 17 percent were foreign born. Of the 193,688 Americans born outside of New York State, 74 percent came from Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida. Thus by 1930, there were more black New Yorkers born outside of New York and outside of the United States than were native to the city or to the state.[18] Manhattan became home to 69 percent of New York's black population, most of whom would live in Harlem.[19]

Langston Hughes once recalled the attraction of Harlem. He wrote, "I had come to New York to enter Columbia College as a freshman, but really why I had come to New York was to see Harlem."[20] At that time, the New York Age reported that it was still attractive: its broad avenues were "well-paved," clean and tree-lined; its homes were spacious and "finished in high style."[21] Indeed, Harlem had become something of a mecca to many of its inhabitants. Seventh Avenue became a weekly parade ground and a daily "campus." Its spirit gave black writers a cultural catalyst and a living stage. The entertainment industry provided a livelihood for America's best black talent. Many Harlemites were quite satisfied with what had become a city within a city. "Today, I believe it is fair to say, Negro America looks to New York for advanced leadership and opinion," wrote journalist, George Schuyler, in 1925.[22] A few years later, Harlem was

designated "the greatest Negro city in the world today and the greatest Negro city in history."[23]

Harlem, however, had two faces. There was another side to black New York that was less rewarding. The institutionalized racism which had encouraged Blacks to migrate to the North had disappeared, but traditions still remained. Once North, disabilities did not disappear. Mary White Ovington's description of the black districts of New York shows that the majority of New York's Blacks lived in poverty. The men worked in domestic and personal services and performed menial tasks in industry. Women usually worked within the home. They paid the highest rents for the wretched tenements in which they lived. When Blacks moved to Harlem, rooming practices and rent gouging contributed to overcrowding. Despite laws to the contrary, they were not assured of access to restaurants, hotels, and other public facilities south of 125th Street. In addition, black professionals and white collar workers were confined to areas north of 125th Street.[24] Harlem's families earned less than the city average. Overall, life could be precarious: in 1929, the infant mortality rate was twice as high; death from tuberculosis was four times as high; and cancer and accidental deaths were greater than the city norm. The lack of opportunity, the physical poverty, the cheapening of human life, and the effects of racism were reflected in crime statistics: in 1928, 20 percent of the male population of the city prisons were black; of the population appearing before women's court, 30 percent were black females.[25] Harlem, however, fought back. Organizations and individuals provided educational programs to help black people improve themselves and better the conditions under which they lived.

Churches were the dominant providers of adult education for Blacks at the turn of the century. Their affiliated lyceums offered an eclectic blend of instruction, enlightenment, and entertainment. In New York City, the major organizations were St. Mark's Lyceum (1881), Bethel Literary Society (1883), Lincoln Lyceum (1883), Acme Literary Society (1883), St. Benedict's Literary Union (1885), Shiloh Lyceum (1885), Turner Lyceum (1886), Salem Mission Lyceum (1891), Abyssinia Lyceum (1910), and the St. James Literary Historical Society (1911).[26]

St. Mark's Lyceum, the largest and best known, survived into the 1940's. Its stated purpose was "to cultivate the intellect and afford its members an opportunity for social intercourse in the most helpful way." The society was organized as a club: officers were elected semi-annually and the members paid dues. The typical program (for which no admission was charged) consisted of a presentation of an essay by a member, discussion of the essay, and musical selections. The topics presented reflected the gentility to which the membership aspired and concern over the racial problems of the times. Occasionally, guest speakers were invited and debates held with other literary societies. Among the notables presented were Ida Wells Barnett, George Haynes, Reverend Reverdy Ramson, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Paul Robeson. Two spin-offs from its weekly program served the health needs of the community: doctors presented regular programs on health care and a physical education club was organized.[27]

A unique picture of lyceum activities is offered by the New York Globe's commentary on the Bethel Literary and Historical Society cofounded by the Globe's editor, Timothy Thomas Fortune. Newspaper accounts referred to its meetings as evening entertainment and listed all who attended. At the meetings, members read, discussed, and criticized one another's papers,

debated assigned topics, or listened to imminent personalities who usually donated their services. During its first six months, society members considered school segregation, African immigration, westward migration, economic values, philosophical issues, party politics, New York morality, and industrial education.[28]

The effects of leadership on adult education activities are clearly shown by the events of the society's first year. Fortune was its first president and the activities reflected his interests and the editorial policy of his newspaper. He selected the topics, assigned individuals to present them, and commented sometimes caustically on the adequacy of the papers both at the meetings and in the press accounts. Fortune often lectured his colleagues, urging more attention to intellectual pursuits and less to "profitless enjoyment." Occasionally he presented arguments for participants who were either ill-prepared or absent; and once even vetoed a discussion when he thought it beyond the understanding of the association members. Ill-prepared members soon stopped coming, attendance dwindled, and meetings were soon reduced to free-wheeling session of little form and substance attended by the faithful. Reorganization occurred after Fortune became less active and the founding pastor died. A newly formed program committe added music, introduced a broader spectrum of topics, established weekly evaluation policies (critiques were assigned to members ahead of time), and invited greater audience participation. The society's popularity soared to the dissatisfaction of some. After a meeting in which the featured lecture was on "Fakes and Fakers," a woman member called for more serious and higher level discussions.[29]

The lyceums were important adult education centers until World War I. Their popularity coincided with the prestige of the church and the eloquence of the pastor. St. Mark's, for example, averaged at its height,

two hundred persons a week, while the Salem Mission Lyceum's director considered an attendance of eighteen as an improvement. The lyceum meetings at Abyssinia, the community's wealthiest church, became so popular that people were turned away. Its pastor, the Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., saw beyond the general cultural improvements generally attributed to the spreading of lyceums in the black community and called for a vanguard role:

> Let the Colored Christians of New York give the people churches with reading rooms, social rooms, gymnasiums, sewing rooms, domestic science rooms, physically clean and morally pure, where people can spend their afternoons and evenings in mental and social betterment, and you will see a revolution among the people of this city.31

The enlarged role advocated by Rev. Powell, Sr., was beyond the reach of most churches. After the First World War War, only his church, St. Mark's, and St. James maintained secular lyceums which were able to survive changing social habits, technological innovations, and the competition offered by public and private agencies.

The Board of Education

Between 1880 and 1930, New York City made available to its adult citizens three types of educational programs: they were evening schools, public lectures, and forums. In all of these black participation was delayed. The dismantling of New York's segregated school system left most black New Yorkers without access to public evening schools. This situation was changed by William L. Bulkley, principal of Public School No. 80, a predominantly black school located in the Tenderloin district. Like Booker T. Washington, Bulkley came "up from slavery" to a position of leadership in education. His work with black adults sprang from his concern for their children and his belief in the efficacy of industrial

education. He strove to impress upon children and parents alike that "if they be worthy, they will be found; men will in time appreciate them according to their intrensic values and their serviceableness."[32]

Bulkley reached out to his neighborhood parents through home visits, speaking at church meetings, parents meetings, individual conferences at the school, and the operation of his "social center." Each term, five nights would be devoted specifically to home, school, industrial, educational, and social events. The organization which Bulkley founded, the Committee on the Improvement of Industrial Conditions Among Negroes in New York (CIICN), held programs at which adults were encouraged to sign up for evening classes in the event they were offered. Finally, in 1906, the board of education agreed to allow Bulkley's school to operate evening classes for one year for the "useful learning of both young and old." At the close of the experiment's first year, Bulkley believed that he had developed a cadre of men and women "better prepared to battle with the industrial problems of life: individuals who were more hopeful, more confident, and more determined.[33]

The evening school program and its students soon became the subject of praise from educators and the press. Wonder was expressed that so many men and women (fifteen hundred during the first year) would come out in all sorts of weather to classes especially when most of them had to sit on top of desks meant for children. Board of education officials pronounced the program interesting, successful, and practical-- " a shining example of the people's demand for the school subjects called by some 'fads and frills.'" These subjects were dressmaking, millinery, cooking, embroidery, bookkeeping, stenography, mechanical drawing, arithmetic, spelling, and selected academic courses.[34]

The response to the experimental program led to funding for a second school. In addition, the curriculum was enlarged to include courses in mattress making, upholstery, printing, glazing, care of boilers, and electrical wiring in order to attract men. Records indicate that the CIICN encouraged the offering of such courses by contributions to the board for the black evening schools, however, these funds in 1911-1912 were only 4 percent of the amount donated by industry for all of the other schools. Attendance at the evening schools in the black community exceeded expectations and occasionally surpassed attendance at all other schools in the borough. The editors of the Age praised the "working girls" and "service boys" (porters, elevator operators, cooks, maids, seamtresses, and laundry workers) who comprised this student population.

> No truer index of the progressive and ambitious spirit of New York Negroes could be found than the patient and sacrificing effort which these night students have made to gain a better training.35

Board policy made high hopes for advancement futile. By 1912, evening school education in New York City had become closely identified with elementary education for foreign students. The city system, then the nation's largest, operated forty-one schools on three levels--elementary, secondary, and trade. The students were overwhelmingly foreign: there were 35,106 as compared to the 9,271 who were native born. Two evening elementary schools were still available to the enlarged and divided black community (one in the Tenderloin and one in Harlem), but the difersified educational program had been reduced. In the interest of efficiency, better control, and higher standards all shop and commercial classes were eliminated from the evening elementary schools. The board also ended the popular civil service examination preparation courses on the grounds that the classes were for personal advancement and did not benefit society.

The standard fare became English for the foreign born, the "common branches," flowermaking, dressmaking, milinery, and embroidery.[36]

Enthusiasm for school waxed and waned in the next two decades. Three evening schools were available in 1912 in Harlem, two for women and one coeducational. The latter, Public School No. 89, offered the standard program plus an independently run experimental social center introduced in 1915. The social center offered a complete settlement program including movies, dances, and free showers. This combination and the exceptional introduction of Pittman shorthand in 1921 contributed to Public School No. 89's outstanding attendance record. By 1925, however, enrollment again showed signs of decline and only thirteen students graduated. Two years later, total enrollment in schools attended by blacks was one-fourth of that of the 1906 experiment.[37]

Residential segregation and discrimination limited black participation at other levels. Evening trade schools and evening high schools were out of the reach of most Blacks. The double discrimination posed by the exclusionary board policy which restricted admission to employed workers perfecting their skills and employment restriction based on race denied eligibility even if a school were geographically accessible. There were no evening high schools in either the Tenderloin or Central Harlem. The two centers designated as Harlem Evening High Schools, one for men and the other for women, were located in areas in which Blacks were not welcomed. Eventually the exodus of whites and the expansion of black Harlem led to the combining of the two schools and black attendance after 1928.[38]

Board of education public lectures were introduced into the black community at the same time as the first evening school program. This was sisteen years after the commencement of the lecture program in 1889.

Henry Leipzeiger, the second superintendent of the lecture program, shaped policy and format. The lecture series drew over a million persons annually, up to 1915. This "Breadwinners University" had three two-month sessions per year, between October and May, at centers throughout the city. The lectures often varied in depth and sophistication according to the neighborhood and cooperating sponsor. Cooper Union gave an American education series at which the speakers were Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, William R. Harper, and John Dewey. Columbia University gave certificates to all students who completed lecture series under their instructors. Other institutions gave examinations and organized reading groups. The success of the lecture series was undermined by the death of Leipziger, its most ardent supporter, in 1915. Rising costs, the censorship imposed during World War I, movies, and the radio eventually dealt fatal blows. The program ended in 1928.[39]

The lecture programs introduced into the black community flourished briefly. With the opening of the lecture program at the Colored Men's Branch of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), black lecturers were authorized for the first time. Reports indicate that the insistence of the local black YMCA's governing board made this hiring innovation possible. The YMCA's lecture series was short lived: programs ended after 1909. The program offered at the 135th library did no better. The library did not enjoy a good relationship with the black community which in turn tended to ignore it despite the prodding of the New York's Age's editor. In 1914 when Harlem was clearly the center of black Manhattan, James Weldon Johnson mused that what was needed was official discrimination, i.e., if Blacks were denied admission, they would be clamoring for entrance. Available reports indicate that

board sponsored program ended in 1922 and library sponsored program began thereafter.[40]

This record of failure repeated itself in the operation of lecture centers in the public schools. Wadleigh High School and Public School No. 90 were both on the fringes of black Harlem, but only the latter advertised in the black newspapers. It was, however, unsuccessful in recruiting an audience. The board claimed it was unable to find willing speakers or organize suitable programs for a racially mixed audience. Subsequent plans by the board to designate Public School No. 90 as specifically a black center were rejected by black leaders who urged, instead, a boycott. The ensuing deadlock led to the closure of the center in 1921.[41]

Black non-participation in the lecture program once it was made available was rooted in the dichotomy between administrative policies and black perceptions. Leipzinger considered the free lecture movement as "a continuation school in the best sense," superior to settlement houses, non-commericial, and non-social. His belief that it was democratic because it brought the professor to the people, bound together the high and the low, brought culture to the "uncultured," and reinforced spirituality was, however, paternalistic, judgemental, and elitist. Teachers were told to "lead souls away from the lowlands of vulgarity" in teaching courses which were at once informational and inspirational. The lectures were "to add to the rational joy" of the city's residents who would be better able to "commune with nature," "delight in study," and "go forth to each day's work." Differentiation in programing was made on the basis of the needs of sections of the city and the presumed intellectual caliber of the residents. He considered the lectures to be "for the public and not for the poor," and eschewed any type of advocacy. Education, not agitation, was

to be encouraged and broad issues were introduced only for the purpose of creating "sane public opinion."[42]

For Blacks in 1905, agitation was a critical need. The lectures offered to the black community failed to meet the educational needs of Blacks as they defined them. For example, in the YMCA's first season, audiences listened to lectures on "Life of a Coalminer," "Making of a Newspaper," "Photography," "A World's Race for a Continent," "Abraham Lincoln," Ben Franklin," "John Brown and his Forerunners," "Life in the Navy," and "the Negro in America"--all one session each. In contrast, in that same year, other centers had lectures on health, earth science (four sessions), electrical engineering (twenty-seven sessions), world civilization (two sessions), United States history (6 sessions), and food preparation. Library lectures which emphasized literature and travelogues did not usually center on black nations or blacks in the arts. The education offered to Blacks was neither industrial nor classical. Black people were not offered information which would help them earn a living or improve the quality of their lives, nor were they offered lectures which would substantially increase their critical understanding of themselves or the world in which they lived.[43]

Service and Voluntary Agencies

Agencies more attuned to the social and economic welfare of black people attempted to fill the void left by board of education policy. Some were established to serve Blacks initially; others reached out from their traditional clientele. They were interracial in nature with varying degrees of black control. The most significant were the Christian associations and the National Urban League.

A Colored Work Department of the Young Man's Christian Association (international division) was established after a petition by black leaders at the 1875 international convention. This department, meant for young adults enrolled in black southern colleges, reached out to urban centers as Blacks moved North. William A. Hunton, its first black executive secretary, took the initiative by modifying the traditional emphasis on religion and adjusting the educational programs to meet the needs of black constituents. He had, however, to justify this departure from traditions to the strongly conservative central body. In an article written for the Voice of the Negro, Hunton argued that the educational programs were necessary to obtain the religious result. He saw the ignorance of black men "thrust into the work world without adequate preparation" detrimental to both the men and to society. He quoted 1900 census figures which indicated that 80 percent of young black men left school before completing the fourth grade, only 5 percent finished high school, and almost 50 percent were illiterate. Other black YMCA workers had come to a similar conclusion. At their first annual conference held in 1903, a resolution was passed stressing their view that the best interests of black people lay in giving emphasis to the interdependence of religion, culture, and employment.[44]

The black YMCA in existence in New York before 1867 became defunct sometime afterwards. Black interest in the "Y" was rekindled after 1900 and attempts were made to integrate the local association near the Tenderloin district. Rebuffed, the black leaders established their own association under Rev. C. T. Walker, pastor of the Mt. Olivet Baptist Church. Rapid growth in membership led to the establishment of a full service facility on West Fifty-third Street with a chapel/assembly hall, a reading room, a dormitory room, showers, and tub baths.[45]

Adult education activities were sponsored by the local branch in association with the New York School of Philanthropy, the Charity Organization Society, and the New York Department of Education. John S. Brown, the YMCA's first education director hoped his program, by demonstrating "what was best in the race," would prove the worth of Blacks as a group and lead to recognition of two classes of black men--"the worthless and the upright, self-respecting, trustworthy, advancement deserving men." Classes were offered in the "common branches," typing, stenography, English conversation, civil service examination preparation, and "Life Problems." Audiences were brought to the "Y" by the programs of its Literary Lyceum and its "Big Meetings." The latter were the Sunday meetings at local churches sponsored by the YMCA and open to the general public. At these meetings, writers, local politicians, and ministers delivered the expected philosophical and spiritual messages, and in addition, expounded on black history and culture in America, the West Indies, and Africa; on black education, and on race consciousness. Their listeners were urged to unite, to buy black dolls for their children, to read biographies of Blacks, to patronize black professionals, and to vote Blacks into the legislature.[46]

The movement of Blacks into Harlem during World War I ultimately led to the black YMCA's desision to do the same. After some wrangling over matters of policy and control, the local board was authorized to build a new headquarters at the present site. In 1919, when the building was opened, over one thousand new members joined the local association. In the pages of the Age, the education department announced its "Opportunity School" which in addition to the courses first made available in 1904, would also offer salesmanship, mechanical and architectural draw-

ing, business courses, and training for waiters, porters, and barbers for the first time. The new YMCA's ambitious plans collapsed after dissension over the personal conduct of its director, the interference of the central board, and charges of racism led to an exodus of black leadership and a subsequent loss of image. By the summer of 1923, all ancillary functions had been abandoned. The Age charged the YMCA with "institutional dry rot" and seven years passed before favorable editorials and news of "Y" events were printed. The impetus for change was the passage of a resolution against segregation and discrimination at the 1931 national conference.[47]

The feminine counterpart of the Colored men's branch was organized also at Mt. Olivet Baptist Church in 1905 by Emma Ransom, wife of Rev. Reverdy Ransom, in association tith Elizabeth Ross Haynes and Mrs. William A. Hunton, wives of prominent black YMCA officials. After a period of slow growth due to a shortage of funds and indefiniteness of mission, the Colored women's branch embarked in 1909 on a program of service to provide "shelter and skills" to the unprepared young women who came to the city in search of higher wages and a better life. A school of French dressmaking was opened at the West Fifty-third Steet headquarters and evening classes were held in shorthand, typing, plain sewing, and conversational English. Personal self-improvement opportunities were provided by a lyceum, a physical sulture club, and a Bible class. Community involvement was offered by a special service club. By the time of its move to Harlem, the branch was considered the mayor source of professional trade courses for women. Unlike the other service agencies, it had established a tradition for itself.[48]

The war years and their aftermath brought change. Between 1916 and

1918, some trade projects and self-improvement programs were temporarily replaced with classes and other activities more related to the war effort. After the war, YWCA leaders remarked on the emergence of class interests among the younger women members. These leaders believed they felt the call of a new mission which stressed individualism and personal opportunity rather than charitable or welfare endeavors. Black women also began to expect increased sharing of responsibilites and less paternalism and segregation. Eva D. Bowles, the secretary for Colored work, summarized their feelings:

> The time is past for white leadership for black people. As white and Colored women we must understand each other, we must think and work and plan together for upon all of us rests the responsibility of the girlhood of our nation.49

Symptomatic of the gradual fulfillment of these expectations was the renaming of the Colored women's branch to simply the West 137th Street Branch.

The success of the YWCA lay in its circumstances and its leadership. The new West 137th Street building was one of the best equipped facilities for Blacks in the country. Though built to serve a membership of twenty-five thousand, in fact, it served the entire black community. In her memoirs, Anna Arnold Hedgemen, then membership secretary, recalls:

> At that time, hotels, restaurants, swimming pools, meeting rooms, many employment agenices and even educational institutions were not open to Negroes. Negro women and girls from all over the city of New York traveled to our building for service, for even white branches of the YWCA were not open to them. . . .
>
> The presence of so many women and girls brought husbands and men friends to our building and under its influence. Our information desk serviced our members and the general public. No Negro leader failed to sign our huge guest book immediately upon arrival in New York. Negro students, largely from the southern Negro colleges, and other visitors to the city signed there too. The Negro newspapers checked our guest book each week in order to report any new arrivals in the city.50

The "Y" soon became so crowded that its educational purpose was almost lost: its crowded calendar , small work space, and limited equipment left little room for the classes of old. However, Anna Hedgeman believed that "life at the "Y" was a continuous educational experience," mand even more important by the fact that they were excluded from the adult education movement which to her mind held the best possibilities for leadership training. As a YWCA executive, she felt her organization "gave them what they wanted and what they needed" despite the loss of formal structure. The educational program became one of "propaganda." Women and men who had succeeded spoke to the "Y" membership and urged preparation, excellence, and achievement. Among the women speakers were college presidents, a bank president, a millionaire, civil rights figures, and religious leaders; among the males were aspiring politicians, businessmen, educators, social workers, and civil rights advocates.[51]

Under the leadership of Cecilia Cabaness Saunders, executive director until 1947, and Emma Shields Penn, trade school director until the sixties, The branch developed a program including vocational training, self-improvement, vocational guidance, and job placement. The trade school, which was administered separately, attacked the problems posed by insufficient training and negligible opportunities. By the thirties, the branch trade school was offering day and evening courses, fee and non-fee, in business and commerce, domestic science, beauty culture, fine arts, the humanities, and religion. This was in contrast to the national policy which promoted a "shift from a subject-centered educational program to one which focuses upon the individual." On the occasion of the branch's twenty-fifth anniversary, the newsletter boasted, somewhat apologetically of its proudness, its progressiveness, and its public mindedness.

Only after it felt the impact of the depression, did the "Y" realize that it had reached only that small segment of Harlem that could afford to pay.[52]

Increasing income and improving employment opportunities were the reasons for the existence of the National Urban League, the third of the three major private service agencies offering adult education services. The league was formed in 1911 by the merger of three interracial service agencies--the National League for the Protection of Colored Women, the Committee on Urban Conditions Among Negroes, and the Committee for Improving the Industrial Conditions Among Negroes in New York. The competing interests of the clergymen, social workers, educators, and civic leaders who made up its board and membership complicated initial league attempts to pursue all of the objectives of all of its three predecessors. Dissatisfaction lead to reorganization in 1914, and a decision to concentrate on "survival services for black families migrating to the cities. In addition, the league did some migrating of its own: it moved from the Tenderloin area to Seventh Avenue in Harlem.[53]

The New York City activities of the National Urban League were carried out by the national office until an affiliate was organized under James Hubert in 1918. Between then and 1925, social work programs relating to job placement, better housing, health conditions, and convalescent care gained ascendancy. Hubert had eliminated league plans which duplicated those of other agencies and only maintained those involving employment. League speakers spoke to black and white audiences at job sites, churches, forums, and study clubs. Their services were meant to teach white workers to accept Blacks who in turn would be educated to increase their efficiency. In cooperation with the 135th Street

Library , the league sponsored the Harlem Community Forum and the Book Lovers Club. The forum was organized to counter Harlem's factionalism and provide a meeting place for "cool, dispassionate discussion." The book club reviewed works by major contemporary black writers at meetings which were often led by the most significant black leaders in the arts. Linkage with the American Hygiene Association resulted in the arrangement of a special course in Harlem for social workers who subsequently conducted a public health campaign.[54]

After 1925, industrial relations departments were organized in all league affiliates. Ira De Reid, the New York unit's first industrial secretary, followed league policy by emphasizing interracial cooperation. He organized an interracial committee to assist his department's educational efforts. The committee's objectives included finding opportunites for black adult education, studying apprenticeship training discrimination, and improving methods of "overcoming mental and temperamental mal-adjustments" which limited employability. With regard to whites, the committee proposed to "devise educational work . . . to liberalize their points of view. . . ." To this end, weekly excursions were conducted into Harlem for groups of whites. The visitors talked with and were exposed to black leaders of many persuations; they visited apartment houses, private homes, social agencies, business establishments, and the offices of black newspapers. Plans for more structured educational projects formulated in 1925 stagnated until the depression. In the thirties, workers study circles and occupational training would be introduced.[55]

The National Urban League pursued a gradualist policy which stressed its ability to bring the "best elements" of black and white

together. Reid was a cautious administrator with conservative expectations. He admitted in a newsletter, "I do not plan to do what Samuel Gompers described as 'hell-fare' work." He anticipated, not a revolution, but rather a start in the right direction. Even the depression failed to shake the restraint inherent in his approach. At a time when traditionally black employment was being rapidly taken over by whites, he sought to convince black workers that if they lost their positions, it was due more to economics than prejudice.[56]

Other service agencies, most predominantly white, provided education for black adults. Hartley House and the Hudson Guild were the first settlement houses to cater to Blacks. The New York Colored Mission held evening classes for the "religious, moral, and social elevation" of black people. Lectures on child care and family life were provided for women by the Free Kindergarten Association for Colored Children. After 1900, St. Cyprian's Parish House and Stillman House were established in San Juan Hill; in the Tenderloin district, the Children's Aid Society established the Henrietta Evening Trade School. Among them were offered family care and homemaking lectures, vocational classes, e.g., restaurant cooking and janitorial service, a mixed chorus, and a drama class. The Music School Settlement for Colored People, an off-shoot of the Lincoln Settlement House, moved to Harlem in 1914. Its supervisor, J. Rosamond Johnson, offered a more varied fare. Among the activities offered to adults were English composition, Spanish, folk dancing, sewing, embroidery, a choral society, and a drama club. It also sponsored performances for aspiring artists and lectures in the arts.[57]

The White Rose Mission and Industrial Association, a black service agency founded to assist women migrants, was the prototype for one of the National Urban League's founding organs. Victoria

Earle Mathews, born a slave, became a leading journalist and organizer in the black women's club movement. The mission rescued hundreds of women, mostly black but some white, from possible prostitution and domestic peonage, by providing a "Christian home" where women might be trained in the "principles of self-help and right living." Lodging was available (for an often uncollected fee) and instruction was given in the usual vocational subjects plus "race history." Although the association offered desperately needed services, it failed to win needed support from the black churches which disapproved of its social activities. For years, support came primarily from benevolent whites. After its move to Harlem in 1918, the association served mainly as a residence hall.[58]

The Public Library

The 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library opened in 1905 to a predominantly Jewish area undergoing transition. Available reports suggest that it was primarily used as a meeting place by organizations associated with the public schools. The central library stressed the public aspects of the branches in its 1911 report. They were expected to offer to the public exhibitions, lectures, classes, meeting places, and entertainment. In turn they were to receive a "more prominent place in the community's intellectual life." Adult services, however, depended on branch leadership. At the 135th Street library, these services were limited: library sponsored activities focused on youth. The initial failure of the library to attract Blacks was due to segregationist traditions and unfamiliarity with Blacks as the client population. The library, for example, did not carry black newspapers in 1914 because of an alleged "deficiency in moral tone." As the neighborhood changed, black use increased.[59]

The transfer of Ernestine Rose to the branch began a new era. The central library actively encouraged adult education and Rose became a valuable agent. As a white librarian serving a black community, she might have been overwhelmed; instead she plunged into Harlem's renaissance. Rose saw herself as developing theory and purposes to help "supply the inner needs of a suffering minority." She proposed to have the library "stimulate and guide" racial pride and race knowledge, while at the same time fulfill its traditional function as a common meeting ground of diverse interests. She believed, as did many, that racial and ethnic groups needed not only education, but also, they needed social adjustment. The library's challenge was to meet these needs by offering information and services to both races so that it might contribute to improvement of race relations.[60]

The activities of the branch reflected Rose's philosophy. At the beginning of her administration, the New York Age announced authorization to host "any meeting of an instructive or literary nature, provided no admission fee was charged, and that nothing of a political, secretarian, or ultra-controversial character was to be discussed."[61] The library subsequently became a popular meeting place for many groups. Community outreach continued with the cosponsorship of the urban league in adult education activities. Especially significant was to be the acquisition of the extensive collection of Arthur Schomburg, made possible by the league, which gave the library the nucleus for its now famous black history division. By the middle twenties, the library was being used by theater groups bearing African names, was exhibiting the works of black artists, and was sponsoring black history classes, black history clubs, and lecture series. The announcements of these activities printed in the Age demonstrate that racial themes were primary.[62]

With these various activities, the library could not long remain a tranquil refuge. Avoidance of the political and the ultra-controversial was impossible in the Harlem of the twenties. Once independent of league sponsorship, the forum became increasingly radical in its choice of topics. Subsequently, for the 1924-25 season, Rose disbanded the forum leadership and chose a new committee supposedly more representative of the library. This censorship badly damaged the library's popularity. Harlem's more active personalities ceased to be involved. Interest in library activities dwindled and Age coverage became minimal. Rose organized a conference in 1931 to increase community spirit in the library and resurrect patronage so that library programs might receive increased funding from the city. The timely decision of the AAAE to sponsor an experiment within the Harlem community gave the library the opportunity it needed to once again become an effective adult education center.[63]

Community Organizations

In addition to the adult education programs sponsored by churches, the school system, civic groups, and philanthropic agencies, there were numerous locally based organizations which designed and supported programs whose impact ranged from petty to phenomenal. Among those in the lesser category are those associations which purposely merged education with entertainment. The Lincoln Lyceum which met on Saturday nights combined speeches with social dancing. At another level, the Unique Literary and Social Club emphasized "cultivation of letters" and satisfaction of personal aims. At the Cleo School of Mental Science, an individual could learn how to read character, how to gain self-knowledge and how to use psychology in business.[64]

Independent schools founded to provide opportunities not available elsewhere met with varying degrees of success. Profit oriented trade schols added to the professional opportunities of adults. Some of the schools which advertised for years in the pages of the New York Age were Poro College (beauty culture), the New York Academy of Business (commercial), Day's School of Pedagogy (teaching license examination preparation), and Bleek's School of Dressmaking. Arts enthusiasts developed schools which offered personal enjoyment and professional growth. The Mendelsohn School of Music, which was established in the Tenderloin district in 1882, offered a classical music education. The Mwalimu School for the Development of African Music and Creative Arts, begun in the late twenties, had a more propagandistic orientation. It proposed to counter racial prejudice through a cultural program which emphasized the black heritage.[65]

Trade, business, professional, and civic organizations assisted their membership and the larger community. Marybell Becks founded the United Dressmakers Protective Association and her own school of dressmaing. The members of the National Industrial and Beneficial Society were eligible for instruction in domestic science, employment services, and sick benefits. The Colored Stenographers Association ran a referral service and held weekly brush-up meetings. The Negro Business League ran lecture series on retail science. The calling of an "educational mass meeting" was a common organizing tactic. The black red caps at Pennsylvania station organized a series of "Peoples Mass Meetings" to protest against labor discrimination. The United Civic League and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People held occasional mass meetings and weekly forums on political or economic issues. All of these

organizations were responding to conditions affecting the black community and all were concerned with racial advancement.[66]

One organization developed in New York had a more literary approach to the racial cause. The Negro Historical Research Society, organized in 1911 by John E. Bruce, proposed to make New York a cultural and intellectual center for the study of black history throughout the world. Its motto was "race is the key to unity;" its symbols were the Sphinx and the Pyramids.[67]

Bruce became an editor for Marcus Garvey, a man whose name is synonymous with militant race consciousness. The organization he established, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), became America's first national black mass movement. The UNIA planned "to work for better conditions among Negroes everywhere." Its educational aim was to establish institutions for racial education and culture. Developing adult education, specifically industrial education, had been Garvey's original reason for coming to the United States. In the early years of his Universal Negro Improvement Association, a Booker T. Washington Institute was established in Harlem. In the twenties, the institute tended to be used for meetings, rather than structured, sequential activities. At a typical UNIA meeting, the front page of the current edition of the UNIA publication, Negro World, containing a selection by Marcus Garvey, would be read aloud, lectures by guest speakers and UNIA organizers would be given, and musical selections would be presented. Henrietta Vinton Davis, international organizer, considered the weekly meetings to be educational:

Here opportunities are given for learning the true condition and

> needs of our people everywhere. . . . We must teach them in our homes the principles of the UNIA--race love, race conscience, race loyalty, and an enthusiastic desire to see Africa redeemed.68

The phenomenal success of the UNIA for a time made many ordinary people rise above the doldrums of their oppressed existence; its colors--red, black, and green--remain silent, but potent symbols within the black community.

The black press, particularly the New York Age, promoted the educational activities of most of the organizations described in this study. For years it was the only newspaper, and as such it was able to speak for and to the community. Although Age policy supported education in the black community, its contributing editor, James Weldon Johnson, made adult education a personal campaign. Johnson was a composer, poet, novelist, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People executive, diplomat, and college professor. His own achievements mirrored the genius he claimed for black people. His column was used to cajole, harangue, and defend. He promoted black history and culture and often printed lists of "must reading." Johnson was deeply conscious of the deep feelings of inferiority which had been instilled in many of his readers. He was a popular orator and consciously used his lectures to raise the level of aspirations of his audience. He believed that by raising the level of race pride Blacks would have a weapon in their struggle for equal rights in this country. By 1928, he felt his goal had been achieved. He noted a "revolution in attitude" because of the recognition given to the works of black artists in all fields which allowed getting at the core of prejudice. At last he was able to write, "no longer does one have to be ashamed."[69]

Conclusion

By 1931, numerous educational programs were available to Harlem's adults. the quality, however, was limited. Public school efforts were largely restricted to elementary school subjects and industrial arts at the handicraft level. The public program did not live up to its possibilities and the forums were often caught up in political intrique. Private agencies offered more programs and included skills training as well as academic subjects. Racial interest manifested itself in several ways: elements of black history and culture were commonplace in the programs of agencies with substantive black leadership, as were discussions of the black political, economic, or social condition. The use of racial history or culture as a tool for adult education purposes, especially in the areas of perspective change and self-actualization, was consciously expressed by few, but actively carried out almost as an assumption. However, as organizations began to challenge the social structure and attempt to influence race relations, the assertion of a need to teach racial pride became common. Educators and race leaders turned to race consciousness as the catalyst for social action which would altimately lead to full acceptance and equality for black people. It is ironic that the organizer of the one mass movement of this period who successfully raised race consciousness and changed people's perspective was considered a dangerous radical.

During this fifty year period, patterns of contemporary practice were established. Activities in black Manhattan reflected American adult education practice in terms of multiplicity of sponsorship, problems of marginality, and significance of leadership. In addition, certain truisms are demonstrated: first, multi-service organizations

do provide popular learning environments with great flexibility, but institutional mission does affect program development; and second, community involvement in program development facilitates participation. In terms of the question of effectiveness of racial interest, this study shows that the propagation of education with a racial focus will attract students, but it may not necessarily improve their lives. Harlem remains one of the most race conscious communities in America, yet it is continuously described as "chronically afflicted with physical and social problems that cry out for public attention."[70] Typically, black adults who take courses with substantial racial interest are seeking knowledge and change. Therefore, in addition to learning subject matter and demonstrating learner competencies, black adults must learn to negotiate or change the system in which they live. A strategy to enhance the abilities of the "aware" student is requisite if racial or ethnic studies are to be meaningful or positive. Without a sense of possibilities, people may fall victim to a hopelessness greater than before, or worse, they succumb to demagoguery and accept the slogan for the substance.

Footnotes

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